



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

CHIYOME L. FUKINO M.D., DIRECTOR
Phone: (808) 586-4410
Fax: (808) 586-4444

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HAWAII REMAINS VIGILANT AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health has received preliminary positive results for West Nile Virus from testing of a single wild sparrow found at Kahului Airport on Maui. Samples are being sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for confirmation.

State and county partners are taking precautionary action by conducting intensive mosquito suppression in and around the Kahului Airport. Suppression activity includes extensive spraying to reduce the mosquito population in the area.

To date Hawaii had been West Nile Virus free despite the disease occurring on the Mainland for the last five years.

Paul Effler, M.D., State Epidemiologist said, "We need to respond quickly and forcefully to control this potential public health threat to the state, as we wait for confirmatory lab results."

(more)

The residents are being asked to eliminate standing water from their property to get rid of places mosquito can breed. Hawaii residents are also being asked to assist in continued surveillance of bird populations. Anyone finding a freshly dead bird should collect the bird in a plastic bag and deliver it to the nearest designated collection site. A complete list is available at (www.hawaii.gov/health) or call 211 for further information.

West Nile Virus is a disease that is usually passed between mosquitoes and birds, but it can also affect humans, horses, and other vertebrates. Most people who are bitten by an infected mosquito will show no symptoms. The majority of those that do display symptoms will have West Nile fever, a mild disease characterized by flu-like symptoms, which typically lasts a few days.

On rare occasions, WNV infection can result in severe and sometimes fatal illness known as West Nile encephalitis. Encephalitis is the inflammation of the brain and/or the membrane around the brain. Symptoms include headache, high fever, stiff neck, stupor, tumors, coma, convulsions and paralysis.

Until the summer of 1999, when it was found in New York City, WNV had not been detected in the Western Hemisphere. Since then, it has affected humans, birds, horses, and other vertebrates in most of the mainland United States, as well as Canada and Mexico. Last year 40 states (including Washington D.C.) reported nearly ten thousand human cases of WNV, resulting in 264 deaths.

For more information visit the Department of Health web site at www.hawaii.gov/health or consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) site at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm.

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For more information, contact:
Janice Okubo
Phone: (808) 586-4442
Cell: (808) 368-6006
Email: jsokubo@health.state.hi.us